



## **Pittsburgh's popularity could bring in the bucks**

By Jason Cato  
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Pittsburgh has enjoyed a banner year, refreshing its "City of Champions" moniker and landing a global economic summit.

With attention on the Steel City as high as ever, marketing and sponsorship experts said it's time for the region to cash in on public-private deals that could add millions to government coffers.

"You want to be associated with a city with panache," said Ed Augustine, founder of The Pathfinder Group, an Atlanta-based municipal marketing firm. "Pittsburgh needs to capitalize on that panache by getting people interested in strategic partnerships."

This year has added to the city's prestige, perhaps, like none before. The Steelers claimed their sixth Super Bowl title in February, and the Penguins hoisted their third Stanley Cup in June. In September, the city hosts the G-20 summit, which is expected to garner attention from Wall Street to the Great Wall of China.

Pittsburgh officials in 2007 hired a marketing firm to seek corporate partnerships for the city. The Active Network Inc. of San Diego has completed a strategic plan and will return this month to discuss implementing it.

In addition to securing sponsorship deals for Pittsburgh, The Active Network also wants "to keep the city's image moving in the right direction," company spokesman Jake Gonzales said. He did not elaborate.

Because of Pittsburgh's population — estimated at around 310,000 residents — some experts said deals might require efforts with Allegheny County, which is home to about 1.2 million people.

"I'm a big supporter of that, and naming rights are always on the table," County Executive Dan Onorato said. "But the price has to be right."

A spokeswoman for Mayor Luke Ravenstahl referred questions to CitiParks Director Duane Ashley.

Ashley said the city received a proposal for an video-display billboard, but those are prohibited by zoning ordinances.

"Given the sheer number of major corporations, foundations and small businesses in our region, we fully expect that this process, once fully implemented, will prove to be a vital tool in addressing our various financial challenges," he said.

A poor economy might hinder sponsorship opportunities, but plans need to be in place to strike when opportunities arise, said David Peart, vice president of business partnerships for the Pens and a former naming-rights consultant.

"Now is a time for a market like (Pittsburgh) to look forward," Peart said. "Its profile is high and prestige is up."

Other cities have been successful in landing sponsorship deals.

Almost \$20 million has poured into San Diego's coffers since 1999, when Pepsi paid to become the city's official beverage and to exclusively sell its products on city property. The sponsorship program has since expanded to include a wireless provider and credit union, among others.

"It's a huge benefit because there's money coming into the city," said Jennifer Wolfe, San Diego's strategic partner director. "(The money) really goes back to the community, and it is a win-win for the companies."

San Diego also is close to striking deals for home improvement, consumer electronics and automotive services, Wolfe said.

*Staff writer Tom Fontaine contributed to this report.*

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